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ABSTRACT

This study of a Kansas program, Project BRIDGE (Building Relationships Is Definitely Good Education), examined the relationship of a parent liaison contact with families of students with emotional disabilities and the students' classroom behavior and academic achievement. Parent liaison logs of 25 students attending a special day school program were analyzed over a seven-year period and parent/guardians were also surveyed. Results indicate that parents were satisfied with the identified parent liaison services and that such activities may have a positive impact on the overall program and student outcomes. (DB)

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Impact of a Parent Liaison in a Special Day School Setting

Introduction

The education of children with emotional disabilities is one of the most difficult challenges facing educators today. Many different programs on the continuum, supporting many different philosophies, are in place. Still, many of these children are failing. As a result of school failure and the enduring manifestations of their emotional/behavioral problems, more services and interventions have been attempted.

From an ecological perspective, it is evident that intense family intervention and family involvement are necessary to ensure the success of many children with emotional/behavioral disorders. To promote family involvement, awareness of parent and family needs is crucial, as is understanding of the child's history of problem behaviors and interactions with people from their various environments. Project BRIDGE, a day school program serving children with serious emotional/behavioral disturbances, utilizes a parent liaison to implement its ecological approach to services for students and their families. This summary describes a study of the relationship of parent liaison contact with families and student's classroom behavior and academic achievement.

Method

Participants

A day school setting, Project BRIDGE (Building Relationships is Definitely Good Education) provides academic instruction, counseling, behavior management and parent/guardian support to students in south central Kansas. Students enrolled in the BRIDGE project met federal and state criteria for special education

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services and had been placed in the Day School Setting by a special education team. Records provided by medical personnel that had worked with the students within the last eight months indicated that these students had a variety of emotional/ behavioral issues. Diagnoses documented included Schizophrenia, Attention Deficit with Hyperactivity Disorder, Conduct Disorder, Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, Depression, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, Situational, and Unknown. The mean age of the participants was 12 years and 9 months. Of the 25 students, 22 were male.

Intervention

The project's parent liaison provides informal support, facilitates support groups, teaches parenting classes (Love & Logic), provides resource information, supports parents/guardians in conferences, and produces newsletters. The parent liaison's duties include many contacts with parents/guardians of the students. Support, education and community resources are accessible through phone, office and home visits.

Procedures

Over a period of seven designated weeks, parent liaison contact logs of 25 students were analyzed. The contact logs included the amount of time the parent liaison at Project BRIDGE spent with parents/guardians. Contact logs also included who initiated the contact (parent liaison or parent/ guardian); the dates and times of contact; reason for contact; and where the contact took place: telephone, home, office/ school or 'other'.

From a review of the documentation, two groups were chosen for this particular study. *Amount of contact time* was the variable chosen to assess the impact of the parent liaison. Two groups, the High Contact Time (HCT) Group and the Low Contact Time (LCT) Group were chosen for comparison.

Behavioral indicators were selected to measure impact of contact time for children in the project. From classroom documentation, the total number of daily points earned for classroom behavior were tallied for the identified students. Also, 'on task' and 'self control' were identified as two specific categories on the point sheet for comparison with the HCT group and LCT group.

Parent/guardian telephone surveys were completed with 21 of the 25 parents/guardians to measure customer satisfaction with the different components of the parent liaison job description. An independent surveyor completed telephone surveys regarding the following parent liaison duties: Newsletter, Individual Support, Parenting Classes, Conferences, and Resources.

Analysis

Data was collected for a total of twenty-five students. The students were rank ordered from highest to lowest on the amount of time that the parent liaison had contact with the parent/ guardian. The students were assigned to the HCT group (12 students) or to the LCT group (11 students). Two students, whose contact scores were too close to clearly place them in either group were eliminated from the data analysis. The elimination of these scores created a wider difference between the two groups on the amount of contact time.

The average scores for the HCT and the LCT groups were compared on the following variables: grades; attendance; total daily points; self-control and on-task scores from classroom point sheets; total number of critical incidents; and responses to questions on the parent/ guardian survey.

Results

Students were ranked from the lowest to the highest for comparison. The HCT group was assigned capital letters (i.e., A= lowest contact time to L=highest) and the LCT group was assigned lower case letters (i.e., a=lowest to k=highest).

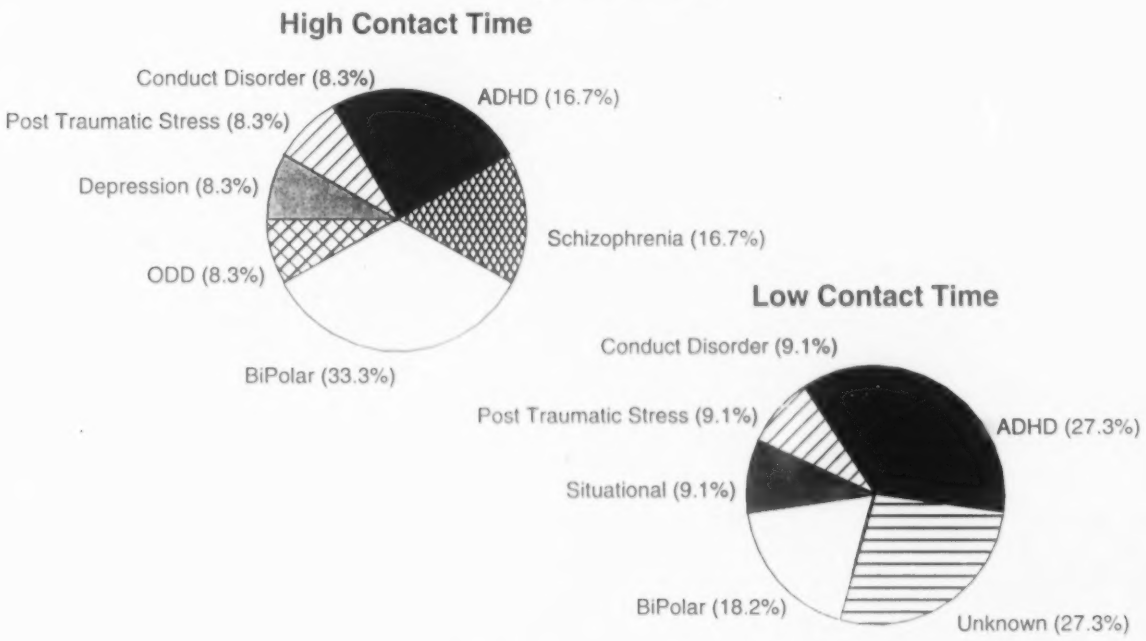
Examination of the clinical diagnoses of the HCT group indicated that the most contact time was spent with the parents/guardians of students with a diagnosis of Bipolar disorder. All of the students diagnosed with Schizophrenia, Depression and Oppositional Defiant were in the HCT group. Students with a diagnosis of Situational and Unknown were included in the LCT group, while no participants with these diagnoses were found in the HCT group. In the LCT group, the amount of time spent with families of students diagnosed with ADHD and Unknown was considerably more than time spent with parents of students with Bipolar disorders (see Figure 1).

The average of the HCT group for grades was 3.6 as compared to 3.0 of the LCT group (see Figure 2).

In the classroom, points are kept on a daily point sheet with six categories including on task, self control, completion of work, respect of property and two individualized target behaviors. The HCT group average on total daily points was somewhat higher than the LCT group. In a comparison of the 'self control' data, the average of 10.5 score of the HCT group was only slightly higher than 10.2 of the LCT group. Time spent 'on task' was also evaluated. Better response from the HCT group was found. The lowest rating for HCT was 4.58 while the lowest rating for the LCT was 3.12.

The parent liaison survey shows a very high rating in all categories from both groups (see Figure 3). Although the differences in average ratings are too small to draw conclusions, it appears that 'resource information' was especially important to both

Figure 1
Student Diagnosis Overview



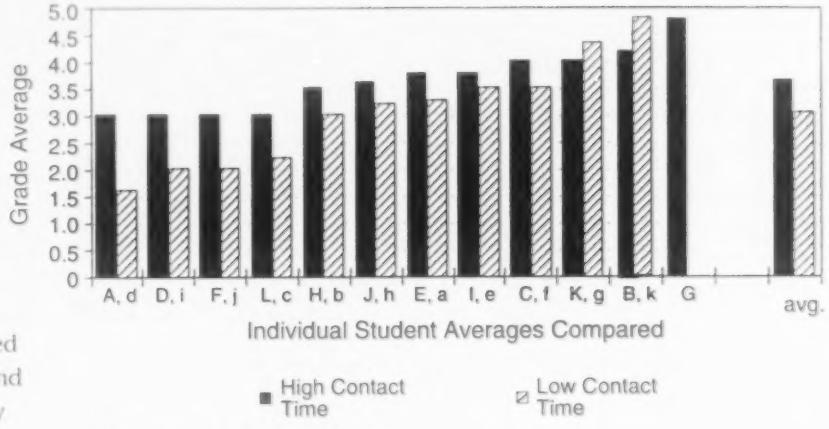
groups. The highest average rating occurred in the areas of 'resource information' and 'parenting classes' for the HCT group, while the LCT group rated 'individual support' as the highest. Although these findings are preliminary, they do suggest that the parents surveyed were satisfied with the identified parent liaison services.

Summary

To our knowledge, Project BRIDGE is the only day school in Kansas that has a parent liaison on staff. Analysis of the documentation and survey results suggest that parent liaison activities may have a positive impact on the overall program.

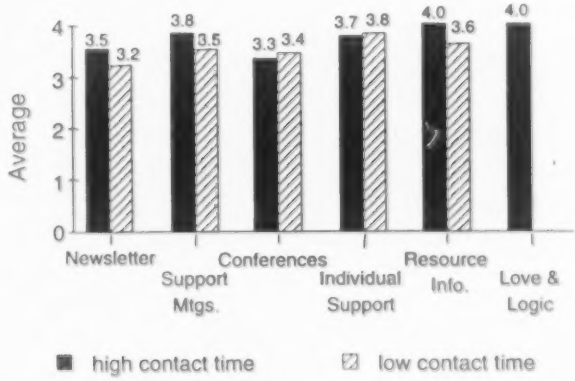
The study indicates the need for more research on the role and impact of parent liaisons in day school settings. Future research could study the impact on specific age groups, plus comparison of specific diagnoses, and assistance with agencies.

Figure 2
Grades *



* Highest grade average possible is 5.

Figure 3
Parent Liaison Survey Averages *



* Highest possible average is 4.